

INDEPENDENT PAPERS

MULLĀ ṢADRĀ BETWEEN MYSTICAL PHILOSOPHY AND QUR'ĀN INTERPRETATION: THROUGH HIS COMMENTARY ON THE “CHAPTER OF EARTHQUAKE”¹

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This article explores the interpretation of the Qur'ān presented by Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050AH/1640), a mystic philosopher of Ithnā'asharī Shī'a Islam in Iran. First, in his Keys to the Unknown (Mafātīḥ al-ghayb), we know the general mechanism of how reading the Qur'ān realizes spiritual perfection. Mullā Ṣadrā considers the Qur'ān as the source of spiritual wisdom with a multi-layered structure of meaning. Through concentration on Qur'ānic texts, a reader's soul will be open to a deeper layer of meaning with an awareness of a higher level of spiritual perfection. As a concrete example, we examine his commentary on the Chapter of Earthquake (Sūrat al-Zalzalah), which depicts the catastrophic events on the Last Day. In the literal meaning, or the surface layer of meaning, he intuitively as a hidden deeper meaning the incessant re-creation and dynamic flux of existence towards perfection, which also explains different transformations of human beings in the hereafter. We find here another spirituality of Islam, which differs from that of the Islam built on the surface meanings of the Qur'ān.

INTRODUCTION

In the present study I will deal with the Muslim mystic philosopher, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), and the question of how he interprets the Qur'ān. I would like to shed some light on the interrelationship between philosophical thinking and interpretation of the sacred text in the case of Mullā Ṣadrā. The Arabic word “*islām*” means “surrender to God,” or “obedience to God.” In order to realize this attitude, human beings must know what God really wishes them to believe and do. The best and most reliable way for men to understand God's

¹ The present paper combines, with revisions and abridgment, my two previous studies originally published in Japanese: “Fukachikai e no sannyū – Morrā Sadorā no seiten kaishakuron” [Penetration into the Divine Secret – Mullā Ṣadrā's Interpretation of the Sacred Texts –], in Ichikawa and Kamada, ed. 1998, pp. 206–23 and “Chūshaku ni okeru kakushin – Morrā Sadorā no Kuruān chūkai – [Innovation in Commentary – Mullā Ṣadrā's Qur'ān Commentary],” *Bungaku* (July–August, 2000), pp. 49–66.

intentions is to consult the Qur'ān, the written record of the very words God spoke to people through His Messenger Muḥammad. However, the revealed Divine words are not always explicit in their meanings or applicable verbatim to all aspects of human life, since they were spoken in particular situations. Thus the importance of the interpretation of the Divine words lies in how to relate the words to the multifarious circumstances of life. The religious system of Islam established in the course of history is the sum total of the interpretations made of the different situations the Islamic community has encountered in its development. Islam is a hermeneutic religion in the sense that it claims to draw from a limited amount of text – namely, the Qur'ān – all kinds of norms that should be applied to every phase of human activity by means of the interpretation of the Qur'ānic text.

At the present time just as in pre-modern, traditional times, Qur'ānic interpretation has a vital role in Muslim society to adjust the Islamic way of life to the contemporary world situation, or in other words, to give Islamic meaning to, and incorporate into the Islamic value system, various products of modernity either in technology or in institutions, and different ways of thinking that Muslims have encountered in recent *global* developments. To obtain the Divine sanction through Qur'ānic interpretation is a means unanimously accepted by Muslims in the past, the present, and most probably the future. Even though the *sharī'a* system, a crystallization of traditional efforts to establish Islamic norms of human conduct, might find itself irrelevant in the modern setting, its underlying principle of drawing norms from the interpretation of the Qur'ān will not lose its relevance and importance. In this sense Mullā Ṣadrā in his ability to draw his own unique world view from the surface of the Qur'ānic text in his interpretation, may be called a forerunner of those contemporary Muslim thinkers who confront modernity and make efforts to adjust themselves to it by their reinterpretation of the Islamic heritage especially in the form of Qur'ānic interpretation. The nature and quality of their thought differ from those of Mullā Ṣadrā, simply because they now live in a completely different spiritual and social climate. However, how they cope with modernity is the same as Mullā Ṣadrā did in his time, that is, the creative interpretation of the Divine words of the Qur'ān.

Mullā Ṣadrā is a figure representative of the mystical philosophy (*'irfān* or *ḥikmah*) that developed in *Ithnā'asharī* Shi'ism (Twelver Shi'ism). He has been respected and honorifically called "Leader of the Transcendent Philosophers" (*Ṣadr al-muta'allihīn*) among traditional circles of *Ithnā'asharī* Shi'ism in Iran and its neighboring Shī'ī areas. His philosophy has been taught as one of the subjects for students at the most advanced level in the traditional religious schools. The research tradition of his philosophy has continued to the present day in Iran.² Outside of the circle of *Ithnā'asharī* scholarship, however, his achievement remained virtually completely unknown until the later half of the twentieth century. Apart from an isolated pioneer work by M. Horten,³ present research on Mullā Ṣadrā conducted outside Iran has been, in a sense, inspired and launched by the two influential scholars, H. Corbin (d. 1978)⁴ and S. H. Nasr.⁵ One is a French scholar well versed in Iranian Islam, and the other is an Iranian scholar equipped with Western research methodology.

2 See Nasr 1996, pp. 323–40.

3 Horten 1913.

4 Henry Corbin's major work on Mullā Ṣadrā is Corbin 1964. Corbin 1972, vol. 4, also contains a study on Mullā Ṣadrā.

5 Nasr 1978. His other studies of Mullā Ṣadrā are collected in different chapters of Nasr 1981.

Both stress the mystical aspects in Mullā Ṣadrā's thought. T. Izutsu (d. 1993) also basically follows this line and sees the most distinct feature of *ḥikmah* philosophy (whose representative is Mullā Ṣadrā) to be a combination of strictly logical thinking and the mystical experience of the ultimate Reality.⁶ F. Rahman (d. 1988) tried to understand the logical structure of his philosophy, though without much attention to his mystical aspect.⁷ These four scholars may be considered to form the first generation of scholars of Mullā Ṣadrā's thought in modern academic circles.⁸ Thus research on Mullā Ṣadrā, unlike that on Ibn Sīnā or Ghazālī, does not yet have a long history.

Following these, there have appeared a number of scholars who are engaged in various subjects of Mullā Ṣadrā's thought. The nature of their respective studies is somewhat dependent on which of his works, or which aspect of his thought, they examine. Recent trends in Mullā Ṣadrā studies seem to be still divided into two types, as we saw in the first generation of scholars.⁹ One consists of studies which place more importance on the religious or mystical elements of his thought, and the other of those in which stress is laid on his pure philosophy, or the logical structure of his philosophical system. Mullā Ṣadrā's thought is known to be a synthesis of discursive thinking and mystical intuition. I believe that one of the important themes of Mullā Ṣadrā studies at the present time is how we are to integrate these two aspects of his thought in our understanding.

Mullā Ṣadrā left commentaries¹⁰ on various chapters of the Qur'ān, though they do not cover it entirely. In this study I would like to clarify the characteristic features of his interpretation of the Qur'ān, through an examination of his commentary on the "Chapter of Earthquake"¹¹ in addition to one of his works entitled the *Keys to the Unknown* (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*),¹² the first two sections of which discuss different issues related to the interpretation of the Qur'ān.

THE REAL NATURE OF THE QUR'ĀN

In the beginning of the first part of the *Keys to the Unknown*, where he quotes a prophetic *ḥadīth*, "The Qur'ān is self-sufficient, and there is neither sufficiency without it nor need

6 See Izutsu 1971, pp. 59–61. He also published a Japanese translation of Mullā Ṣadrā's *Kitāb al-Mashā'ir* (Izutsu 1978).

7 Rahman 1975.

8 All four scholars contributed articles directly or indirectly related to Mullā Ṣadrā to the special issue on Islamic philosophy of *The Philosophical Forum A Quarterly* (1972) among the total of nine contributors.

9 This is based on the impression I received when I participated in the World Congress on Mullā Ṣadrā in 1999 in Tehran. A recent increase in the number of scholars who have an interest in Mullā Ṣadrā is partially due to the founding of the Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute in Tehran in 1994 and its active engagement in organizing the World Congress on Mullā Ṣadrā and in re-editing and publishing Mullā Ṣadrā's works. These activities on the Iranian side have helped the wider academic world become informed about the philosophical heritage cultivated within a rather small circle of Shī'ī intellectuals.

10 His commentaries on the Qur'ān are collected in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, 1366AH solar. As for the general characteristics of his *tafsīr*, see Nasr 1998, pp. 45–58. Mohsen Saleh studies Mullā Ṣadrā's interpretation of the Verse of Light (Qur. 24:35) in his Ph.D. dissertation.

11 In this paper I have used the Arabic text contained in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr suwar al-Tāriq wa-al-A'lā wa-al-Zilzāl*, 1363AH solar (a) [Abbreviated as *Tafsīr* in the following notes]. I also consulted the text contained in the *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 7, pp. 409–44.

12 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, 1363AH solar (b) [Abbreviated as *Mafātīḥ* in the following notes].

with it,”¹³ Mullā Ṣadrā discusses the self-sufficiency and the comprehensiveness of the Qur'ān.

In the Qur'ān there are the realities of the words and the exquisite portions of the wisdom whose knowledge is nourishment of spirits (*arwāḥ*) and nutrition of hearts (*qulūb*). In a similar way, it contains particular knowledge and physical (*ṣūriyāh*) medicine such as [edifying] stories and [legal] judgments; they are useful for those who are still on the way to salvation and the general believers (*‘awāmm*). The Qur'ān further contains that which supports the well-being of the two worlds: this world (*dunyā*) and the hereafter (*ākhirah*), and it does [specifically, such instructions] as retaliation (*qīṣās*), blood money (*diyāt*), marriages (*munākhaḥāt*), and inheritances (*mawārīth*), which support the well-being of this mode of being. Therefore, it contains nourishments both spiritual and physical and portions that are related with both the hereafter and this world. (*To be*) a provision and benefit for you and your cattle (Qur.79:33) There is nothing that is not demonstrated or explained in the Qur'ān. If there were a passage from your inner dimension to the suprasensual world (*‘ālam al-malakūt*), you would know that the Qur'ān demonstrates every thing.¹⁴

The Qur'ān gives to human beings all kinds of knowledge that is indispensable for well-being in both this world and the hereafter, such as wisdom, which encourages their spiritual growth, and concrete norms which show, in terms of morals, the right way to live in this world. The concrete norms the Qur'ān gives include regulations concerning revenge, marriage, divorce, inheritance and other legal matters, which enhance the happiness and peace of this world. From the standpoint of Mullā Ṣadrā, greater emphasis is placed on the Qur'ān viewed as the source of spiritual wisdom, but the role of the Qur'ān as the foundation of the sacred law (*sharī'ah*) is recognized as being for ordinary believers who are still on their way to spiritual perfection.

The Qur'ān as the source of spiritual wisdom “cures all patients who suffer the illness of ignorance, quenches the thirst of those who aspire to the Truth, and heals those whose minds (*qulūb*) are sick with chronic malady of blameworthy characters and the destructive disease of ignorance.”¹⁵ It is medicine from God, and this medicine is His help in a form that is within human understanding and human reach,¹⁶ offered so as to save human beings suffering under various restraints in this world, such as ignorance, evil character, and

13 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 10. This *ḥadīth* is found in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 1403AH 1983, vol. 92, p. 19 with a slightly different word order.

14 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 11.

15 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 10.

16 Mullā Ṣadrā said: “With the greatness of its strength and shelter and the loftiness of its secret and meaning, it [the Qur'ān] is clothed with garments of letters and sounds and is dressed in the attire of words and sentences as the token of His mercy and sympathy with His creatures, by the way of which He may be intimate with them, get close to their understanding, treat them with courtesy, and move down to their tastes. (*Mafātīḥ*, pp. 10–11)

material desires. The Qur'ān is "the caller from the highest world, sent to deliver human beings who are imprisoned in this abyss, the prison of this world."¹⁷

This world, that is, the material world where human beings lead their different kinds of life, is regarded as a dark prison for human souls because of its materiality. On the other hand, this world is also regarded as the basis for preparing for and supporting their spiritual perfection in the direction of the "hereafter mode of being" (*al-nash'ah al-ukhrawīyah*). Thus the world where human beings live may be evaluated both negatively and positively. The dichotomy concerning the estimation of this world is convincingly explained if we think in the following way. This world is nothing but a prison in darkness for those who indulge in sensual temptations without knowing the existence of the higher world beyond it. This world, however, can also be the springboard towards realization of the luminous world for those who aspire to spiritual perfection and the perfect attainment of the "hereafter mode of being." Thus understood, the Qur'ān functions to explain the present condition and situation of human beings and give the true knowledge necessary for them to go beyond this world. That is to say, the Qur'ān is a gnostic means for salvation.¹⁸ In his *Keys to the Unknown* Mullā Ṣadrā understands the Qur'ān to be the source of spiritual wisdom, by whose help human beings in the darkness of material existence are able to attain spiritual perfection.

MULLĀ ṢADRĀ'S PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION

"Although it is one reality (*ḥaqīqah wāḥidah*), the Qur'ān has many stages in its descent. The names of the Qur'ān vary according to its different stages. In every world and every mode of being, it is called by a name which is suitable to its specific station and particular location."¹⁹ The Qur'ān has many names, which in total reach a million. Only those who have inner understanding (*sam' bāṭinī*) can understand the real forms which the Qur'ān manifests in terms of its names. Thus Mullā Ṣadrā considers that the Qur'ān has a multi-layered structure of meaning, which lets it present different meanings at different layers of interpretation.

¹⁷ *Mafātīḥ*, p. 11.

¹⁸ Gnosticism here is understood as a pattern of thought not as the historical phenomenon that appeared in late antiquity and was sometimes branded heresy in connection with Christian orthodoxy. Human beings are made to slumber in the darkness of matter, but they can realize their salvation, or spiritual perfection, once they receive *gnosis*, namely, the knowledge of salvation which the Qur'ānic message conveys. Mullā Ṣadrā's framework of thought understood in this way shows a clear gnostic nature. However, there can be found no dualism of the true God and the evil creator of the world, which is counted as one of the distinctive characteristics of gnosticism. Although he mentions darkness of matter and the fall of human beings into the material world by the sin committed by Adam and Eve, Mullā Ṣadrā does not totally deny the *raison d'être* of this world, because it has certain significance as a place of preparation for the higher world. It might be difficult to call his thought gnostic if we stress the latter point as the decisive feature of gnosticism. See Jonas 1963, pp. 42–47. For Mullā Ṣadrā's references to Adam and Eve, see *Iksir al-'arīfīn*, ed., Kamada 1984, pp. 108–09; *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyah*, 1346AH solar, pp. 299–300; *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah fī al-asfār al-'aqliyah al-arba'ah*, 1404AH [Abbreviated as *Asfār* in the following notes], vol. 8, p. 321.

¹⁹ *Mafātīḥ*, p. 23.

There is a well-known *ḥadīth*, which goes “The Qur’ān has a literal meaning (*ẓahr*), a hidden meaning (*batn*), a limitation (*ḥadd*), and a point of transcendence (*maṭlaʿ*).”²⁰ Of these four meanings, the third meaning of “limitation” is interpreted as being related to matters lawful and unlawful in Islamic law. The fourth meaning, “a point of transcendence,” means a point through which man can attain the transcendent world, that is, the realm of God.

Mullā Ṣadrā discusses this *ḥadīth* in a section of the *Keys to the Unknown* and presents the existence of four different levels of meaning in the Qur’ān, though his quadripartite division of meaning proposed here does not exactly correspond to the quadripartite division in the *ḥadīth* quoted above.

Learn that the Qur’ān has two different aspects: covert (*sirr*) and overt (*‘alan*) similar to the human being. Either of them has respectively further outer (*ẓahr*) and inner aspects (*batn*). The inner aspect of the Qur’ān has another inner one in such a way that [only] God knows it and that no one but God knows its interpretation. It is said in a *ḥadīth*: “The Qur’ān has an outer and an inner aspect. Its inner has as much as seven inner aspects,” just like the stages of the human inner dimension which consists of soul (*nafs*), heart (*qalb*), intellect (*‘aql*), spirit (*rūh*), mystery (*sirr*), hidden (*khafī*), and most hidden (*akhfā*).²¹

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the Qur’ān has two meanings, covert and overt; each of them is further divided into outer and inner meanings. Thus the total division results in four categories (levels): (1) overt-outer, (2) overt-inner, (3) covert-outer, and (4) covert-inner. The first of these four levels (that is, overt-outer) is that of the written words of the Qur’ān, which we can read with our eyes. In the case of the second (that is, overt-inner) our internal senses such as imagination (*khayāl*) can perceive its meaning. Our internal sense perception can grasp the object of our internal sense even if the object has no corresponding existence in external reality. To put it in other words, we can imagine any form through our faculty of imagination even if its object has no corresponding existence in the external world. But its imagined forms are of material nature as far as they are images of forms attached to matter. These first two levels of the Qur’ānic sense are concerned with this world and are perceptible to all human beings in this world. On the other hand, the third level of the Qur’ān is something that human spirit can grasp. However, human spirit cannot grasp the meaning of the third level of the Qur’ān unless it goes beyond created-ness, is cleared of sensuous dusts, and reaches the realm of the Divine Order (*amr*). The human spirit receives knowledge through its intellectual faculty from the realm of the Divine Order. [External] senses and internal senses like imagination and estimation (*wahm*), whose objects of perception are attached to matter, are related to creatures (*khalq*), while intellection is related to the realm of the Divine Order. The fourth and last (that is, covert-inner)

20 *Mafātīh*, p. 39. This *ḥadīth* often works as the basic reference that supports esoteric interpretations of the Qur’ān. For example, Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283/896) refers to it in his Qur’ān commentary. See Böwering 1980, pp. 139–42. *Hadīths* similar in form and meaning to that quoted are found in Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-ṣāfi*, 1402AH/1982, vol. 1, pp. 9–31, where Kāshānī mentions that the *ḥadīth* quoted is transmitted in Sunni circles (*al-‘āmmah*).

21 *Mafātīh*, p. 39.

level of Qur'ānic meaning is beyond the realms of both creature and the Divine Order, and is hidden from both senses and intellection.²²

Thus, Mullā Ṣadrā divides the levels of meaning of the Qur'ānic words into four. The first two levels correspond to external and internal sense perception and are assigned to this world, namely, the world of creatures. The third level is the realm of pure meaning, which only intellects can grasp and it is assigned to the realm of the Divine Order. The last one corresponds to the Unknowable realm of God, which neither senses nor intellects can reach.

As for the interpretation of the sacred text, Mullā Ṣadrā states: "The truth (true interpretation) for the people of God is the understanding of the Qur'ānic verses and *ḥadīths* based on their original concepts without diversion (*ṣarf*) and arbitrary interpretation (*ta'wīl*)."²³ Thus he stresses the importance of the original meanings of the Qur'ānic words. Again he says (or quotes from an excellent scholar):

If Qur'ānic verses and traditional reports (*akhbār*) were not understood in terms of their literal concepts and their principal concepts in such a way that most philosophers (*falāsifah*) assert, then their revealing and coming would have no benefit for human beings; rather their revelation would necessarily bring them embarrassment and deception, which contradicts His guidance, mercy, and wisdom.²⁴

In this way he stresses the importance of the literal meaning of the sacred texts as the foundation of his further quest for the meaning of the texts. When his concentration is placed on the principal meanings of certain words in the texts without paying attention to their secondary or subordinate meanings, his concentration gives his soul a certain impression, through which he can proceed further to a higher level of meaning.

He explains this process with the example of balance (*mīzān*).²⁵ The word "balance" here is applied to any tool or knowledge by which something is weighed or measured. The reality of balance is something not articulated (*amr muṭlaq*), which becomes articulated into various forms of balance at different levels of perception, such as sense, imagination, and intellect. A meaning, which is found in every manifestation of balance constitutes the core of the meaning of balance. Any specific form of balance, either tool or knowledge, has in itself a share of the reality of balance, and the word "balance" is applicable to it. For example, the meaning of balance comprises a wide range of physical and mental objects, such as a ruler (*miṣṭara*) to measure length, an astrolabe (*aṣṭurlāb*) to measure the position of the stars, prosody (*ʿilm al-ʿarūḍ*) to measure the rhythm of poems, logic (*ʿilm al-manṭiq*) to measure rightness and wrongness of judgment, and substance of intellect to measure everything.

22 The discussion in this paragraph is taken in summary from *Mafātīḥ*, pp. 39–40.

23 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 93.

24 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 93.

25 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 92. The explanation with the example of balance is also found in Mullā Ṣadrā's disciple, Fayḍ al-Kāshānī's Qur'ān commentary. al-Kāshānī, 1402AH/1982, vol. 1, p. 32.

The customary form of the balance [as a tool] with a pair of scales, a stem and a hand, which we often see and to which we are so accustomed, does not make a perfect gnostic forget its real meaning, when he hears the word “balance.” His mind is always in such a state [that he never loses awareness of the real meaning] in whatever he sees or hears. A perfect gnostic moves [from the external form of something which he senses] to its meaning, travels from its external aspect and form to the core of its meaning, and from its mode of being of this world to that of the hereafter.²⁶

In Mullā Ṣadrā's understanding, the Qur'ān has a multi-layered structure of meaning. Supported by the *ḥadīth*, Mullā Ṣadrā proposes four levels of meaning of the Qur'ānic text from lower to higher. One of the characteristic features of Mullā Ṣadrā's worldview is its emanative tripartite nature, in which the realm of existence is divided into three levels: physical, psychic, and intellectual, to which correspond three modes of being (*nasha'āt*): this world (*dunyā*), the intermediate world (*barzakh*), and the hereafter (*ākhirah*) in order from lower to higher. Human beings are expected to attain spiritual perfection by ascending the way of the three levels towards God. The levels of Qur'ānic meaning which Mullā Ṣadrā proposed correspond generally to his scheme of the modes of being.²⁷ Human beings cling to the Qur'ān as the means of salvation, and they seek to attain spiritual perfection by penetrating into the meaning of the Qur'ānic text from surface to depth. The literal meaning of the text has a cardinal importance for his interpretation, because it makes a concrete foundation, from which he proceeds to higher levels of meaning, where human beings are disclosed knowledge of salvation.

MULLĀ ṢADRĀ'S INTERPRETATION OF THE “CHAPTER OF EARTHQUAKE”

The Chapter of Earthquake of the Qur'ān (Chapter 99 *Sūrat al-zalzalah*; usually regarded as Madinan²⁸) is very short and has only eight verses, as follows:

In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

When earth is shaken with a mighty shaking
and earth brings forth her burdens,

26 *Mafātīḥ*, p. 92.

27 Here in the *Mafātīḥ*, Mullā Ṣadrā adopts a quadripartite division probably evoked by the *ḥadīth* to which he refers. The fourth and last level is described as an absolutely transcendent realm beyond the other three levels, which has no relation with human souls, while the foregoing three levels are in perfect harmony with his scheme. We infer that this last level is simply an incidental addition to the tripartite division Mullā Ṣadrā always presents. See *Asfār*, vol. 9, p. 211, among others, where Mullā Ṣadrā succinctly illustrates his own tripartite worldview. As for the significance of his tripartite worldview, see Corbin 1972, vol. 4, pp. 115–22.

28 This *sūrah* is usually regarded as a Madinan revelation, while many European scholars of Islam think it as an early Meccan. There is a group of Muslim commentators of the Qur'ān who mention the possibility of its being Meccan revelation. See Watt 1970, pp. 210–11. Among those who refer to the possibility of its Meccan revelation are al-Maḥalli, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*, n.d., vol. 2, p. 168; Ismā'īl Ḥaqqī al-Brūsawī, *Tafsīr rūḥ al-bayān*, 1405AH, vol. 10, p. 492; al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī*, 1405AH, vol. 29, p. 208; al-Ṣābūnī *Ṣafwat al-tafāsīr*, 1406AH, vol. 8, p. 590; Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī zilāl al-Qur'ān*, 1410AH, vol. 6, p. 3954; al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, 1394AH, vol. 20, p. 342; and Maudūdī, *The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, 1988, vol. 16, pp. 161–62.

and Man says, "What ails her?"
upon that day she shall tell her tidings
for that her Lord has inspired her.

Upon that day men shall issue in scatterings to see their works,
and whoso has done an atom's weight of good shall see it,
and whoso has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.²⁹

In his commentary, Mullā Ṣadrā quotes most of the comments of Zamakhsharī dealing with this chapter. Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) is the author of the well-known Qur'ānic commentary *Kashshāf*,³⁰ which is regarded as one of the best commentaries in terms of linguistic analysis of the Qur'ānic text, although Sunni scholars have criticized his Mu'tazilī deviation from the Sunni orthodoxy.³¹

This chapter depicts the earthquake that takes place as the catastrophe at the end of the world. In this earthquake all human beings are restored to life, God judges their conduct in their lives in this world, and they receive His reward or punishment accordingly. The message of this chapter is simple and clear. Mullā Ṣadrā's literal interpretation of this chapter is based on Zamakhsharī³² and is located within the reach of established traditional understanding without introducing arbitrary interpretations.

While leaving intact the literal interpretation, he transfers the setting of the chapter into another level of context and reinterprets the chapter. The newly introduced context is based on Mullā Ṣadrā's own worldview that he claims to be supported by divine inspiration. He mentions in the beginning of his *Tafsīr* on the Chapter of Earthquake the nature of his own Qur'ānic interpretation as follows:

The points [to be discussed in the *Tafsīr*] concerning the Chapter of Earthquake suggest some of the revealed secrets of the chapter, which God pours from His inner self (*min laduni-hi*) into the heart of the man [i.e., Mullā Ṣadrā] who seeks refuge in His gate (*bāb*) more earnestly than in any other gates, and who devotes himself in his thought to His Book more ardently than to any other books.³³

Thus his interpretation of the Qur'ān does not stop at the dimension of literal interpretation where he depends on Zamakhsharī's commentary, but further proceeds to another dimension, namely, that of the interpretation of hidden meaning of the Qur'ānic text.

29 Arberry trans. 1955, vol. 2, p. 348.

30 al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq al-tanzīl wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl*, n.d., 4 vols.

31 Baydāwī (d. 685/1286 or later) whose Qur'ān commentary is regarded as representative of the classical commentaries in Sunni circles, depends much on Zamakhsharī's *Tafsīr* though the former made efforts to keep away from the latter's Mu'tazilī "deviation" in his work. See Gätje 1996. The most commonly used edition of Zamakhsharī's *Tafsīr*, referred to in note 30, contains in its margin, Ibn al-Munayyir, *Kitāb al-Inṣāf fīmā taḍammāna-hu al-Kashshāf min al-I'tizāl*, which criticizes Zamakhsharī's "deviation."

32 Out of the total 28 lines of Zamakhsharī's comments on this short chapter (*Kashshāf*, vol. 4, pp. 285–87), Mullā Ṣadrā quotes about twenty lines in his *Tafsīr* (pp. 227, 228, 234, 236, 237, 242, 243) and only omits some explanations of words, some quotations from the Qur'ān and old poems, and a theological discussion. As far as Mullā Ṣadrā's basic understanding of the literal meaning of this chapter is concerned, it is clear that his commentary is greatly indebted to Zamakhsharī's work.

33 *Tafsīr*, p. 223.

The last earthquake and human resurrection, that is, the events in eschatological time, occur, he claims, in a time-space which is completely different from that of the ordinary consciousness.

Everyone cannot always understand how this earthquake [described in this verse] takes place in the earth. It is because it does not occur at a certain particular time (*waqt juz'ī*) of the various times of this world (*dunyā*). Human beings cannot witness it with their cognitive organs (*mashā'ir*) of this world, for these senses (*hawāss*) which horses and sheep share with human beings are specified to witness particular events and temporal incidents which occur in this world. The resurrection and its various states, which pertain to mighty matters in the universal (*'azā'im al-umūr al-kullīyah*), do not come under the particularity (*juz'īyāt*) of this world. *Surely the earthquake of the Hour is a mighty thing.* (Qur. 22:1)³⁴

Any event in this world takes place at a particular time in a particular place. All events are scattered in different spots over a wide range of time and space. However, in eschatological time-space, all events take place at one time in one place. Eschatological time-space encompasses in a moment all of the particular times and spaces. In this sense the events depicted in the Qur'ān are considered to take place on a higher level of a mode of being which is different from the mode of being of this world.³⁵

In the Arabic text of Verse 1: *idhā zulzilati 'l-arḍu zilzālā-hā*, [earth]quake (*zilzāl*) is specifically qualified with a pronoun (*damīr*, i.e., *-hā*) which refers to the earth (*arḍ*). Mullā Ṣadrā thinks the qualification suggests that “this [earthquake] is a kind of movement which is known to, is specific to, and occurs according to its innate nature (*jibillah*) and disposition (*gharīzah*) to, the earth, and again that it is firmly rooted in the nature of the earth, as the innate matters of things are neither to get detached nor to decrease.”³⁶

Mullā Ṣadrā sees behind the earthquake in the Qur'ānic text the implication that the earth has movement as its essential nature. Further the earth in this chapter is understood as all that exists in a broad sense.

Similar to heaven and what is therein, the earth and what is therein have an essential substantial movement (*ḥarakah dhātīyah jawharīyah*) without a moment's rest. There is no nature (*ṭabī'ah*) or natural things but they cease to be in the substantial movement towards perfection (*al-ḥarakah al-jawharīyah al-istikmālīyah*), through which they seek for the First Truth (*al-Ḥaqq al-awwal*) and return to Him.³⁷

34 *Tafsīr*, p. 225.

35 See Kamada 1990, pp. 93–110 (in Japanese), whose revised version in English I read at the World Congress of Mullā Ṣadrā (Tehran 22–27 May 1999).

36 *Tafsīr*, p. 227.

37 *Tafsīr*, p. 227. As for the theory of substantial movement (*ḥarakah jawharīyah*), which is counted as one of his original contributions to Islamic philosophy, see Rahman 1975, pp. 94–108.

He understands by this verse that everything in existence always moves or transforms itself towards perfection. The incessant dynamic transformation, which he intuitively in the earth, is based on the reality of existence, which does not cease to manifest itself in various degrees of strength and weakness, perfection and imperfection. All that exists is in a continuous movement returning to the origin of existence or towards perfection. Thus he intuitively in this verse that all that exists is in an incessant re-creation and dynamic flux of existence towards perfection. This intuition constitutes the basis of Mullā Ṣadrā's idea of the soul's spiritual growth.

The last three verses (Verses 6–8) show that human beings must receive the reward or punishment that they deserve for their conduct during their lifetime. However, in the context of Mullā Ṣadrā's thought, to see the result of their conduct is nothing but to transform themselves into specific animals, angels, or devils in the hereafter.

Everyone is gathered [in the hereafter] towards the aim of his endeavor and the goal of his work, that is, in accordance with what he had loved in this world and had worked for to such a degree that *if one of you loved a stone, he would be gathered with it*.³⁸ Repetition of actions gives rise to qualities (*malakāt*) [in him]. Every psychic quality or attribute that dominates the internal dimension of man presents him in the hereafter in a form suitable to the quality. Say: "Every man works according to his own manner (*shākilah*)" (Qur. 17:84) No doubt that actions of the wretched who turned their backs [to,] and were turned back [by, God] are in accordance with their imperfect intentions which locate on different stages of the intermediate worlds (*barāzikh*) of animals. The forms they take are limited to [those suitable for] inclinations of cattle and beasts, which dominate their souls, just as mentioned in the speech of Him, the Most High: *when the savage beasts shall be mustered* (Qur. 81:5), and also in a *ḥadīth*: *Some people will be mustered in the form of an ape or swine suitable to them*.³⁹

All that exists is in movement towards perfection. Human souls in this world are covered with matter. They all have the same form as human beings, namely, they are human beings in the bodily aspect, no matter how inhuman they are in their souls. However, when proceeding along the way of spiritual perfection and detached from the body, (i.e., their transfer from this world to the hereafter through death), they separate from the matter which used to cover their true nature and manifest the real forms which have been hidden in their souls.⁴⁰ For example, a pious noble man will be transformed into the form of an angel, but an arrogant and careless man into that of a lion, and a greedy and avaricious man into that of a swine. In this way Mullā Ṣadrā reads in these verses spiritual transformation of human beings in the hereafter.

38 The editor of the *Tafsīr* in his note on p. 238 mentions that this *ḥadīth* is found in al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, al-Majlis 82, where, however, I could not find it. It appears with slightly different wording in the Majlis 27. See Ibn Bābūyah, *Amālī al-Ṣadūq*, 1400AH/1980, p. 113.

39 *Tafsīr*, p. 238. Mullā Ṣadrā quotes the *ḥadīth* at the end of this passage in his *Asfār*, vol. 9, p. 5 as one of the *ḥadīths* that demonstrate his understanding of resurrection.

40 Mullā Ṣadrā means by the resurrection of human beings "their emergence in the world of the hereafter from their material covers and wraps" (*Tafsīr*, p. 227). His understanding of resurrection relates in a subtle way to the idea of metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*), which Islamic orthodoxy rejects. See Kamada 1995, pp. 119–32.

Human speech and acts are sound and movement as long as they remain in the mode of being of this world. Therefore, they have no eternity (*baqā'*) or permanence (*thabāt*) in themselves. Why and how do human speech and acts as temporal existents give rise to permanent qualities in their souls? He explains this process by using the concept of "imprinting existence" (*al-wujūd al-kutubī*) as follows:

When speech and acts form their imprinting existence, they attain the degree of eternity and permanence. In this way whosoever speaks or acts will receive certain impressions (*athar*) on his soul, and his impressed state (*ḥāl*) continues for a while. When his soul repeatedly receives the impression, his impressed state becomes enduring qualities (*malakāt*), due to which he can easily activate the act without deliberation, intention, or necessity of either efforts to acquire or hard work. His impressed state and quality in the world of the soul respectively correspond to speaking (*takallum*) and writing (*kitābah*) in the world of the body.⁴¹

Just as oral speech attains a kind of permanence by its being written, the words and deeds of the human being affect his soul, which develops a state and acquires enduring qualities through their repetition. The enduring qualities that his habitual speech and behavior form in his soul during his life in this world lay the foundation of his acquired form, either beautiful or ugly, in the hereafter. Mullā Ṣadrā here in this context gives no theoretical explanation, but asserts that all human deeds such as the mastering of different arts and trades, education, and obligations prescribed by Islamic law (*sharī'ah*), would be totally meaningless without subscribing to this assumption.⁴² Human transformation in the hereafter is enabled by the mechanism of the soul's acquiring of enduring qualities.

Mullā Ṣadrā simply borrows the literal interpretation from a previous authority of the Qur'ānic commentary. But he tries to reinterpret this literal interpretation in a completely new context, namely his own worldview, which is claimed to be divinely inspired. Through the filter of his worldview, the Qur'ānic chapter is understood as signifying that human souls make their way towards spiritual perfection based on the incessant transformation of existence. Their resurrection and related events suggest a transfer of their souls from the mode of being of this world to that of the hereafter. Reward or punishment for their conduct is interpreted as a phase of spiritual transformation towards perfection.

CONCLUSION

The Qur'ān has a multi-layered structure of meaning. Human beings can penetrate into a deeper level of meaning from the literal meaning as an entrance into the Qur'ānic matrix of meaning. Because of its soteriological nature, the deeper they penetrate into the Qur'ānic meaning, the closer they get to spiritual perfection. The way to perfection for human souls seems to correspond to the scale of deepening in their process of penetration

41 *Tafsīr*, p. 246.

42 *Tafsīr*, p. 246.

into the Qur'ānic meaning. In his interpretation of the Chapter of Earthquake, Mullā Ṣadrā makes clear the reality of the world, which is seemingly stable but transforms itself every moment in the flux of existence. He places importance on literal meaning as the basis of further penetration into it. His way of interpretation, in which the literal and the inner interpretation coexist without infringing upon one another, may break through the strict dichotomy conventionally understood as existing between these two types of interpretation, to be found not only in Islam but also in other religious traditions.

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